



# A SHORT STUDY ON ZACCHAEUS FROM LUKE CH.19:1-10 AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW A MAN WAS BRANDED AS STIGMA OF THE SOCIETY, A SHAME TO THE COMMUNITY AND A THREAT TO THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH IN THE TIMES OF JESUS CHRIST

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## ABSTRACT

Zacchaeus is Model of personal transformation as a civil servant in overcoming the Shortcomings, Social Stigma and Ostracism after Meeting Jesus Christ who Restored his Identity from a SINNER to Son of Abraham. The Approach to the Topic is a Short Inductive Bible Study (Observation, Interpretation, Application) based on a New Testament Gospel Text taken from the Gospel of Luke Ch.19:1-10. (Taken from Mobile App-NKJV)

We talk and listen about social change, community transformation and following rigorous religious piety. But in such contexts, we find people like a MAN Zacchaeus who happened to be the Chief Tax Collector and by that position he was a civil servant of the Roman Empire. We find people with high ranks and profound riches and still live under the crushing elements of Stigmatization, object of relegation and a target of hatred and violence.

In the writings of two volumes, the writer Luke records several incidents, events and teachings of Jesus Christ. In this specific text context, the writer presents Jesus is the Son of Man being prophesied by the Old Testament writer Daniel in his book. Here what we witness is that Jesus had already predicted His Death and Resurrection and was walking from mount of Transfiguration to the hill of Calvary near Jerusalem with His Disciples and a crowd. He was passing by the town of New Jericho.

But before moving on, He had healed a blind man of his blindness. So naturally, the news of such a miracle spread around the town, which was a famous commercial hub for exporting local goods to the international markets. Here we find Zacchaeus having his office of the chief tax collector on the highway leading towards the countries in Africa. The news about Jesus passing by his location, Zacchaeus runs for a sight, eventually ending up climbing a sycamore Tree from which he would have a glimpse of Jesus Christ.

The story ends with an encounter with Jesus who requests Zacchaeus if he could host Jesus as his guest before He moves on to Jerusalem only to be crucified. The welcome with many guests and hospitality ends up in a Transformation of the Man Zacchaeus. Jesus blesses him with Salvation including his household and reattribution his lost identity back from a sinner to the son of father Abraham.

The following is an exercise for a better grasp of the issues related to the society and stigmatization and explanation of certain aspects of transformation of human beings by Jesus.

## 1. OBSERVATION

- A. Then **Jesus** entered and passed through Jericho. JESUS is on His way to Jerusalem to be handed over to the High Priests and to the Roman authorities to be crucified. In this passage Luke introduces Jesus as the Son of Man who had come to seek and to save which was lost. But this Luke writes for a gentleman called Theophilus in order to help him know Jesus Christ well.
- B. **Jericho.** Jericho was an important town in Luke's days settled beyond the old Jericho of Joshua's time. This was a new Jericho which was a hub for international commerce and export famous for grapes, figs, dates and roses.
- C. Now behold, there was **a man named Zacchaeus** who was a **chief tax collector**, and he was **rich**. One day Jesus was passing by the city where Zacchaeus lived and had an office, he heard about Jesus and therefore he **sought to see** who Jesus was, but **could not** because of the **crowd**, for he was of **short stature**. So he **ran** ahead and **climbed** up into a **sycamore** tree to see Him, for He was **going to pass** that way.
- D. And when Jesus came to the **place**, (of the sycamore tree on which Zacchaeus had climbed) He **looked up** and **saw him**, and **said to him**: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." So he: made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.
- E. But when **they saw** it, they **all complained**, saying, "He (Jesus Christ) has gone **to be a guest** with a man who is a **sinner**."
- F. Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

- G. And **Jesus** said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the **Son of Man** has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

## 2. INTERPRETATION

### 1. **Jesus:**

For Luke, Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the Son of Man as Jesus Himself said.

(Lk.22:69) Luke refers Jesus in context of the prophecy of Daniel 7:13 that the Son of Man is coming embodied in the human flesh sent by God to Judge the world. But before He judges the world, He shows His love, mercy and justice to people being full of compassion. In his writings, Luke wanted to emboss the truth upon Theophilus that Jesus is an “Ideal Man” for Romans and is an “Ideal god-man” for the Greeks. (Shahu Modak/P.48/Pavitra Shastracha Aarakhada)<sup>1</sup> Luke projects Jesus Christ as an Ideal teacher who uses life stories in the form of Parables (Total 11) and highlights the fact Jesus Christ is also a Man of Prayer.

We find at least **eleven** references of Jesus’ prayers in the Gospel. Luke encourages the followers of Jesus to be people of prayers because the followers, who are called to be a Church, must pray. Any church<sup>2</sup> if it doesn’t pray is not the Church which belongs to Jesus Christ. (John Stott, Men with a Message, P/56-57)

The writer Luke places this incident right in the light of Jesus’ walk to Calvary only to be crucified as He had predicted many times. Jesus began His Pascal Journey right from the mount of Harmon where He was transfigured and from there to Jerusalem from Galilee. During His walk He teaches many things with example and parables to His disciples. Along with the walk to Calvary, He performs several miracles of healings and many of those who were healed followed Jesus to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus of Jericho was the blind who received his eyesight was one among many who followed Jesus when He entered and was about to pass by Jericho. Luke had a definite purpose of placing the events in order and wanted to place Jesus as the Son of Man in the minds of the readers.

### 2. **Jericho:**

The meaning of the name of the town Jericho is “Fragrance or Sweet Smell”<sup>3</sup>

(NBD, P.611-613) which was a place of chief commerce of Export of Figs, Grapes, Dates and Roses. These were taxed at Jericho which was on highway from East to south West and whose chief tax collector was Zacchaeus.

He was placed there by the Roman Governor serving as a civil servant of Roman Empire. More over originally during the time of Joshua’s conquest this fortified city was destroyed and cursed as well. (Joshua Ch.1-6)

The city in which Zacchaeus lived was not the ancient Jericho, but it was a new settlement near the ancient

monumental debris. This town is called 2nd Jericho and Jesus entered this city and was passing through it towards Jerusalem.

### 3. **A Man:**

A common word in Greek used for a male to show the difference between the gender identities that Zacchaeus was a complete normal male person. Luke uses such words to classify the humans as a physician.

### 4. **Zacchaeus:**

Since this incident is a real encounter with Jesus, Luke shows that the MAN was no other than Zacchaeus. His name is given by his parents who were Jews by birth. He was named as Zacchaeus meaning: Holy, Separated, and Pure. By his name it is observed that Zacchaeus was a good healthy and wealthy person who had everything he needed for his life.

The writer Luke presents his case in such a way that even a person like Zacchaeus had needed nothing and still he was without Jesus Christ the Son of Man in his life. Luke argues that without encountering and meeting Jesus Zacchaeus would remain healthy and wealthy but would not have the restoration of his identity as son of Abraham<sup>4</sup>. He became a “huios Abraam”<sup>5</sup> (Mobile Application- Hebrew and Greek Bible/Strong-g-5207,11) in place of a sinner and psychophant.

His stigma stamped by the religious authorities as a SINNER and also a PSYCHOPHANT would never be wiped away by any means. The encounter with Jesus Christ changes his social stigmatization to a new title being son of Abraham.<sup>6</sup> (Oxford Dictionary @www.google.com and www.merriam-webster.com)

The secret of restoration of his real identity hid into the Son of Man Jesus Christ who came walking to his house offering SALVATION<sup>7</sup> (Strong/g/4991) to him and to his household. Only Jesus had power of offering salvation in order to give him safety, freedom and restore<sup>8</sup> (Strong/g/4991) the lost identity, stolen identity or branded identity of man Zacchaeus.

### 5. **Chief Tax Collector:**

He was a Roman Civil Servant doing his job of taxation and collection by excise duties rated for the goods exported from the port of Jericho to the empirical

cities even to Rome. Products<sup>9</sup> (NBD/p.611-613) like Dates, Figs, Grapes and Roses were famous and created a huge supply market in the region located near the Eastern High Way to Egypt and Africa.

His title CHIEF shows his official position as an overseer of many tax collectors like that of Matthew the Levi. He was a man of respect and the Roman government trusted his qualities and capabilities well. So he continually enjoyed the favor of Roman Government by being placed as the

Chief Tax Collector. It was an extraordinary title with huge responsibility. Google.com/AI suggests that “Zacchaeus’ story highlights a shift from being a despised figure to a man who finds salvation (Freedom) and is accepted by Jesus and the community.”<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to see the way Zacchaeus moves on towards a transformation.<sup>11</sup> (Web/06/06/2025@6.50pm)

#### 6. Rich:

He did not need money or riches. He had all that was needed. But in spite of wealth he was curious about the person Jesus Christ who was passing by his way. Most probably there was something lacking in his life which his wealth could not gratify. Somewhere in his heart, there lay a vacuum which nothing could fill.

His richness did not stop the social ostracism<sup>12</sup> and hatred from the Jewish community. Most likely the Jewish religious leaders were happy with what he could contribute to the religion with his riches but in their eyes, he never rose above stigma. The richness could not change and transform him from a sinner to a son and eventually a member of the family of Father Abraham.

#### 7. Seeker of Jesus:

Zacchaeus had a genuine interest in Jesus. It might be because just before meeting Zacchaeus, Jesus healed a blind man called Bartimaeus (Luke 18)<sup>13</sup> of his blindness and that news had spread like a wild fire around the city and region. As he might have sat in his office, someone must have given him the news of the healing of the blind man and how Jesus was going to pass by the place where he lived. So what we witness is despite his social stratification and place in the crowds, he ran to see Jesus not knowing how to see him. Zacchaeus was not only happy with the news about Jesus passing by Jericho but his curiosity led him to run towards the road on which Jesus was passing by towards Jerusalem.

#### 8. Short Stature:

The PHYSIOLOGICAL LIMITATION WAS CAUSED either BY HEREDITY or some other reasons of human physiology. Luke is a physician and it is important for his readers to understand his descriptions and observations. For Luke this small in stature person is also a MAN as equal to any Jewish male. Zacchaeus’ height did not reduce him to a heathen the non-Jew. He was also son of Abraham which others cared less.

In some advance societies the ATTITUDE towards physical personality looks, color, prowess, economy, trade, birth and even height have significance either it for good or bad in sense. Humans are stratified with such outward qualities rather than seeing humans as humans created in the image of God-the “*imago dei*”.<sup>14</sup>

#### 9. Ran Ahead: Athleticism:

Zacchaeus must have been well built and healthy enough to run. His running shows his enthusiasm and desire to see

his wish fulfilled without any hindrance of delay. He ran ahead shows that there were some other people running towards the incoming Jesus on the road but since he was short of stature, he found himself limited in seeing Jesus. He tried but he did not give up on one attempt. He did not feel himself a failure. So he tries another plan of climbing a nearby Sycamore tree and he did. He not only knew well the art of climbing but also knew the art of climbing down a tree. He was a man of wisdom and courage to be aware of the consequences of his actions. It is important to have subsidiary plans to meet the goal and Zacchaeus knew it well.

#### 10. Sycamore Tree:

There are various explanations about this tree. The Egyptians venerated it as sacred tree, the others thought of it as a “symbol<sup>15</sup> of strength, endurance and spiritual connection.” (www.bernheim.org-06/06/2025@7.17pm.) It looks like that the season of figs was over because the figs are found on the stem and branches. Whatever it might be, but this tree was unusually chosen by God for Zacchaeus well in advance and he did not know about it.

#### 11. JESUS WAS GOING TO PASS BY:

JESUS WAS GOING TO JERUSALEM TO BE CRUCIFIED AND NEVER TO RETURN TO JERICO. THE 2ND IS ZACCHAEUS’ ANTICIPATION IS APT TO MAP THE LOCATION AND HOW TO FIND A TREE TO CLIMB TO SEE JESUS.

#### 12. JESUS:

While still walking, Jesus suddenly comes across the strange situation like seeing a person sitting on the Sycamore tree to see Him. What was the reaction of Jesus when He saw a man sitting on the Sycamore tree? He **looked up**, and **saw him**, and **said to him**.

#### 13. COME DOWN: JESUS said to him,

“JESUS CALLED HIM BY NAME. DID JESUS KNOW HIM BEFORE OR DID HE HAVE ANY ENCOUNTER BEFORE- MIGHT BE AT A FEAST GIVEN BY A LEVI MATTHEWS<sup>16</sup> THE TAXCOLLECTOR! (Luke 5:27,29)

- **Make haste:** The word for haste<sup>17</sup> is “pseudo” (strong/g/4692) in Greek and it means urge earnestly and do it speedily.
- **And come down:** Jesus wanted Zacchaeus to come down. Zacchaeus could not provide hospitality and in return receive the blessing of transformation by staying high. He must come down from the height and be humble enough to accompany Jesus in His mission to Calvary. Zacchaeus had decided to come down hastily to receive Jesus. To come down also not an easy task once he climbs the height. In order to accompany Jesus he had to “come down”<sup>18</sup>. (Greek word is katabaino meaning coming down from sky or from higher land-Strong/g/2597).
- **For today I must stay at your house.** Jesus requested Zacchaeus to shelter Him for some time before moving on to Jerusalem.

#### 14. But when they saw it, -WHO ARE "THEY -"-THE COMPLAINENTS?

- They (those who accompanied the crowd with Jesus were also from priestly class leaders and elders of the Sanhedrin, Pharisees and Scribes together) **all complained**, saying: The people had two complaints. One was that "He (Jesus Christ) has gone **to be a guest** and second was gone "with a man who is a **sinner**." A ROMAN CIVIL SERVANT OF BEING CHIEF TAX COLLECTOR WAS LABELLED AS "SINNER" WORTHY OF DIVINE CONDEMNATION AND SOCIAL OSTRACISM.

#### 15. But Zaccheaus Stood And Said:

HE DID NOT FEAR WHAT THEY TALKED ABOUT HIM NEITHER HAD HE BOTHERED ABOUT HIS STATUS BRANDED AS A SINNER.

#### 16. Today:

This term today is an important term when used as God's intervention in the human history for an immediate action or effect. The term today is related to the salvation offered by the Savior offering Redemption by Ransom, Freedom by Power and Restoration with Good will. By this act the saved is protected forever to the eternity. So here Zacchaeus got the Salvation by the Savior Jesus Christ without any good work or without any ransom being paid to the Savior. It was right in the now.

#### 17. Salvation:

It is a term related to the history of redemption in which God the Savior is seen involved in the act of salvation in many ways, especially in the saving of His people. The concept of salvation is a process leading towards the complete wholeness of a saved and nothing can destroy, corrupt nor steal it from to whom it is invested. But it teaches that once a person was saved, in the present he is being saved and in the future he will be saved forever.

#### 18. Son of Abraham:

Zacchaeus was a Jew by birth and eventually was eligible for the blessings of father Abraham genealogically to inherit them racially. But the society of his day had defined the Abrahamic heritage their religious way.

Since he was a civil servant over Jews, he was a threat to the Jewish community they thought. Because of his profession and civil standards, he was not accepted as "Righteous" but rather he was ostracized as a "Sinner". He had a dual identity leading to a confused or complex identity. What Jesus Christ does to him is to **Restore** his God given identity as the son of Abraham again after Zacchaeus accepted the offer to become a new transformed man after the meeting with Jesus Christ.

#### 19. Son of Man Came:

Luke uses the prophecy of Daniel 7:13 that the Son of Man is coming embodied in the human flesh sent by God to Judge the world. In this event of transformation of a civil servant into a son of Abraham, the Son of Man is seen

showcasing the Judgment upon the prevalent customs, traditions, extra biblical or theological precepts applied without the permission of Jehovah, Rabbinic rules and regulations imposed in the religion and temple practices. Jesus was not afraid to pronounce the judgment over Zacchaeus' transformation. Being Son of Man He was sent to Seek and to Save which was lost.

#### CONCLUSIVE APPLICATION FOR THE LESSON:

1. Zacchaeus stands as A ROMAN CIVIL SERVANT WHO BEING CHIEF TAX COLLECTOR WAS LABELLED AS A "SINNER" WORTHY OF DIVINE CONDEMNATION as well as who deserved SOCIAL OSTRACISM for being a servant of the enemy of Jewish state, the Roman empire, by taxation upon his own people. But for God of the Bible, every official also is worth saving and loving.
2. In such paradox we see the intervention of Jesus Christ as the Son of Man in the situation and transforming the person by restoring his lost identity ascribing upon him as a lost but found son of Abraham again. Jesus Christ is the Son of Man who had come to restore the lost identity and life of every soul.
3. Before such grand thought of encountering with the social evil, age old stratification and ugly attitudes need change. This lesson teaches that before it must take place, the personal transformation is the KEY for societal, community or religious transformation. It is important to note that TRANSFORMATION PAVES THE WAY OF REFORMATION.

#### REFERENCES

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2. Any church if it doesn't pray is not the Church which belongs to Jesus Christ. (John Stott, Men with a Message, P/56-57)
3. Jericho is "Fragrance or Sweet Smell" (NBD, P.611-613)
4. The restoration of his identity as son of Abraham.
5. Mobile Application- Hebrew and Greek Inter Linear Bible/ Strong-g-5207,11
6. a SINNER who was also a PSYCHOPHANT (Oxford Dictionary @www.google.com and www.merriam-webster.com)
7. Son of Man Jesus Christ who came walking to his house offering SALVATION (Strong/g/4991)
8. Salvation in order to give him safety, freedom and restoration. (Strong/g/4991)
9. Products like Dates, Figs, Grapes and Roses were famous and created a huge supply market in the region
10. A shift from being a despised figure to a man who finds salvation (Freedom) and is accepted by Jesus and the community."
11. Zacchaeus moves on towards a transformation. (Web/06/06/2025@6.50pm)
12. The social ostracism-Ostracization is an act of expulsion. (www.definition, meaning and synonyms-Vocabulary.com-7/06/2025,@8.5pm)
13. Jesus healed a blind man called Bartimaeus (Luke 18)
14. As humans created in the image of God-the "imago dei".(www.pbs.org-7/6/2025-8.8pm)
15. Sycamore Tree: Symbol of strength, endurance and spiritual connection." (www.bernheim.org-06/06/2025@7.17pm.)
16. LEVI MATTHEWS THE TAXCOLLECTOR! (Luke 5:27,29)
17. The word for haste is "pseudo" (strong/g/4692) in Greek: Urge earnestly.
18. Greek word is katabaino meaning coming down from sky or from higher land- Strong /g/2597